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# ETV spotlights Cougar New Tech, Head Start migrant center | Education | The Press & Standard

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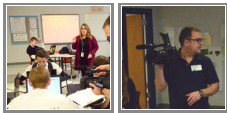
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Photo by DREW TRIPP

## DOCUMENTING INNOVATION

SCETV videographer Gaines Halford and reporter/producer Katherine McCollough film Cougar New Tech students as instructor Tabatha DeWitt advises them on an assignment they're working on.



By DREW TRIPP [sportsdesk@lowcountry.com](mailto:sportsdesk@lowcountry.com) |  
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Journalists working on a national feature series spotlighting ways schools are lowering dropout rates while promoting college and career readiness trained their focus on Colleton County this week.

Katherine McCollough and Gaines Halford, she a reporter and producer and he a videographer for South Carolina Educational Television (SCETV), visited Colleton County High School's Cougar New Tech Entrepreneurial Academy in Walterboro and the Head Start Program's East Coast Migrant Project Center in Lodge, both as part of their work on the Corporation for Public Broadcasting's (CPB) ongoing "American Graduate" initiative.

"American Graduate" is a long-term CPB initiative aimed at helping communities through public broadcasting solve the high school dropout crisis by raising awareness about the problem and ways to combat it. More than 75 public radio and television stations in over 30 states have partnered with more than 1,000 community organizations and individuals and 200 at-risk schools in those states to shed light on the problem and share solutions, according to the CPB website.

"We're looking for innovative approaches schools have found to retain students and keep them engaged with their classwork where maybe more traditional methods have not been successful," McCollough said.

Cougar New Tech, which was the first school of its kind when it launched at the start of the 2013-14 academic year, introduces students to scholarly subjects through real-world problem solving in a group setting, as opposed to the traditional lecture-and-textbook style of instruction.

Cougar New Tech's instructional model emphasizes project-based group learning across multiple areas of study, as opposed to individually learning about one subject or honing one skill at a time. Students use technology to complete group projects as they would in a professional work environment. Courses are taught in double-classrooms by pairs of facilitators who integrate subject content.

McCollough heard about Cougar New Tech through Courtenay Nantz, a member of Furman University's Riley Institute staff who is responsible for directing the implementation of the transformative New Tech method in high-poverty, historically low-performing schools across South Carolina.

In her time interviewing the Dean of Cougar New Tech, Melissa Crosby, and Cougar New Tech students and instructors, McCollough said she was most taken with the students' level of foresight regarding their academic and professional futures.

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"I think the kids — I talked to about 8 students — all seemed to have a game plan, and seemed to already know where they're going after (high school)," McCollough said. "And I was talking to kids in ninth and tenth grade. I don't think I had my life quite that planned out at that age."

"Some of them even know what school they want to go to and what degree they want to seek, and what career they want to pursue afterward. And they talked about this in very specific detail. That was surprising to me."

McCollough and Halford also visited the Head Start East Coast Migrant Project facility, which like all Head Start initiatives provides comprehensive child development services to pre-school aged children from economically disadvantaged families.

East Coast Migrant Projects, as the name suggests, are located in the Southeast and are specifically targeted to serve the families and children of migrant workers. Lodge's school serves roughly 70 students per year.

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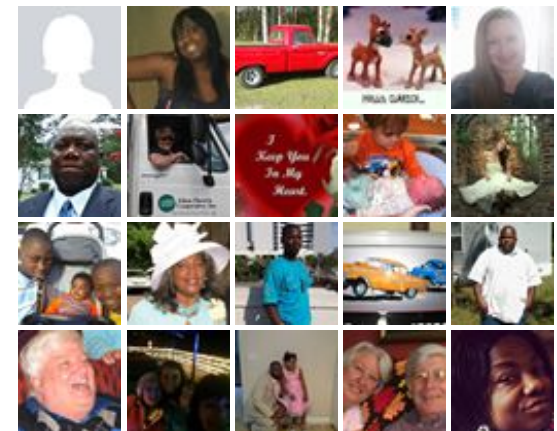
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